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Trends

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USSR-China

Glow of Gorbachev Visit Dimmed by Chinese Turmoil

Both Moscow and Beijing's treatment of President Gorbachev's historic visit to China, marking the end of three decades of interstate and interparty estrangement, emphasized areas of agreement and indicated that continuing differences—particularly over Cambodia—will not prevent the further development of relations. In an effort to sustain the impression that the visit constitutes a major success for Gorbachev's foreign policy and to avoid offending any of the possible winners in the current Chinese power struggle, Soviet media deemphasized the massive demonstrations in China during the visit and showed sensitivity toward the Chinese leadership's dilemma in dealing with the unrest.

The Sino-Soviet dispute was officially ended during Gorbachev's 15-18 May visit to China—the first Sino-Soviet summit since Nikita Khrushchev's 1959 trip. Gorbachev met separately with several senior Chinese leaders, first with his official host, President Yang Shangkun, and the following day with senior leader Deng Xiaoping, Premier Li Peng, and finally party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang. In a joint communique issued at the end of the visit the sides noted that the summit meeting “symbolized” the normalization of interstate relations (*Pravda, Renmin Ribao*, 19 May). During their meeting, Gorbachev and Deng “jointly announced” the realization of normalization, agreeing to “let bygones be bygones” and to “look ahead” toward expanding bilateral ties (*Renmin Ribao*, 17 May).

Despite the two sides' expressed intention to disregard the past, Beijing sought to claim primary responsibility for the summit coming about and to subtly fix blame for the past alienation on Moscow. During his meeting with Gorbachev, Deng took credit for first proposing the idea of a summit, although he also gave Gorbachev credit for promoting the idea in his August 1986 Vladivostok speech, which Deng said had demonstrated “new content” in Soviet foreign policy (*Renmin Ribao, Pravda*, 17 May). Although both sides stressed their desire to close the book on past problems and look to the future (Beijing



Gorbachev meets Deng Xiaoping. (Soviet television, 16 May 1989)

television, 16 May; *Pravda*, 17 May), Chinese media accounts of the Deng-Gorbachev meeting nevertheless cited Gorbachev as acknowledging certain unspecified past Soviet "mistakes" (*Renmin Ribao*, 17 May; Beijing television, 16 May), a remark not reported in Soviet media.

Cambodian Issue

Beijing's treatment of the Deng-Gorbachev meeting glossed over continuing differences about Cambodia and made it clear that bilateral relations will continue to develop despite disagreement on this issue. *Renmin Ribao* reported no objection by Deng when Gorbachev said that China's longstanding "three obstacles" to normalization had been "removed." Notwithstanding Deng's stern lecture on Cambodia to Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze during the latter's visit just three months ago and the recent stiffening of Beijing's position,¹ *Renmin Ribao* only tersely reported that the leaders' discussion of Cambodia failed to reach agreement "on all points" and that the two sides' foreign ministers would continue to exchange opinions on the issue. In line with Moscow's usual emphasis on the positive, the *Pravda* account of the Deng-Gorbachev meeting reported only that they had agreed to seek "the swiftest political settlement" in Cambodia.

Nevertheless, the summit did nothing to resolve the longstanding disagreement between the two sides over the terms of a Cambodia settlement, and the communique on the visit pointedly noted that despite "all-around and

¹ See the *Trends* of 15 February 1989, page 3, and 10 May 1989, pages 1-3.

in-depth exchanges" on Cambodia, the two sides "still have differences." The communique made it clear that, in addition to continued disagreement over international aspects of the question, such as the UN role in an agreement, the two sides still disagree substantially on the difficult issues concerning an internal settlement in Cambodia. Spelling out these divergences, the communique indicated that Moscow maintains its position that the "internal" problems of preparing for an election should be solved by the "Cambodians themselves," while Beijing, in keeping with its longstanding policy, "favors" the formation of an interim four-party coalition government headed by resistance leader Prince Sihanouk to manage the elections.

Military Detente In contrast to the lack of movement on Cambodia, progress appears to have been made on reducing the level of military confrontation, although Beijing is reluctant to acknowledge anything beyond unilateral actions. The communique noted that the two sides had agreed to "take measures" to reduce military forces along the border "to a minimum level," but it did not mention any consultations or joint actions. In his 17 May Beijing press conference, however, Gorbachev reported a decision to set up a "working negotiating mechanism" for troop reductions along the border (*Pravda*, 20 May). Such an agreement was also mentioned in the *Pravda* account of Gorbachev's meeting with Premier Li (17 May) but not in Chinese media reports of that session. During the two foreign ministerial visits in December 1988 and February 1989 the Soviets appear to have pressed for some type of negotiations on military issues, but the Chinese have yet to publicly endorse such a step.²

Despite its reluctance to be seen to be involved in military negotiations, Beijing was quick to applaud further unilateral Soviet steps toward military detente. According to the communique, Beijing welcomed the start of Moscow's most recent troop withdrawal from Mongolia on 15 May. In an interview with Soviet reporters, Li gave the impression that Gorbachev had told him Moscow intends eventually to withdraw all of its troops from Mongolia (TASS, 16 May; *Renmin Ribao*, 17 May), but Soviet media did not quote Gorbachev as making this pledge. The communique did note Beijing's hope that a "complete" withdrawal would take place in a "short" time.

Border Demarcation In an apparent indication that serious horsetrading over various disputed sectors of the border will now begin, the communique noted that, "in a spirit of mutual accommodation," negotiations on eastern and western sectors of the border will be reunited and

² See the *Trends* of 7 December 1988, page 4, and 15 February 1989, pages 5-6.

that discussion will be held at the foreign ministerial level "when necessary." "Common understanding" was reportedly reached on "most" of the eastern sector last fall and joint aerial surveys of the western sector have been conducted since then.³ Previously, negotiations on the eastern and western sectors of the border had been held separately and only at the deputy foreign minister level or below.

Atmosphere

As has long been the case for high-level Sino-Soviet meetings, Beijing's reporting on the visit appeared less upbeat than Moscow's. *Pravda's* editorial assessing the visit characterized the atmosphere of the talks overall as "open (*otkrytyy*) and friendly" (*Pravda*, 21 May), while the *Renmin Ribao* wrapup editorial published on the 19th did not describe the atmosphere at all. Descriptions of Gorbachev's individual meetings likewise differed.

- *Renmin Ribao* called the meeting with Deng "friendly and frank" (17 May), while *Pravda* the same day added "constructive" to that characterization.
- *Renmin Ribao* also characterized the meeting with Li as "frank and friendly" (17 May), but *Pravda* described the atmosphere as "warm and friendly" (17 May).
- Curiously, *Renmin Ribao's* more upbeat description of the meeting with Zhao as "friendly" (17 May) was not echoed in *Pravda*. At the end of a report on the Zhao meeting, TASS on the 16th had described Gorbachev's "meetings and talks" in general as "warm and friendly," but this description was omitted in the next day's *Pravda*.

**New Order/
New Thinking**

Deng made a deliberate gesture to Gorbachev in the ideological sphere. He favorably mentioned Gorbachev's "new political thinking," and the communique included a reference to it together with Deng's concept of a new international political order. *Renmin Ribao's* account of Gorbachev's press conference carried his remarks on the consonance of the two concepts. While some Soviet officials and media commentators have linked the two approaches, this marks the first time Chinese media have reported any Soviet as making that point.⁴

³ See the *Trends* of 2 November 1988, page 35.

⁴ See the *Trends* of 15 February 1989, page 6.



Gorbachev as tourist at the Great Wall. (Soviet television, 17 May 1989)

Party Ties

Both Moscow and Beijing treated the summit as constituting the resumption of party-to-party ties. The communique confirmed that "contacts and exchanges" between the CPSU and CPC would "develop" on the basis of "independence, complete equality, mutual respect, and noninterference." Curiously, there were discrepancies in Chinese reports on just which meeting constituted the formal restoration of ties. Most Chinese media accounts of the Deng-Gorbachev meeting quoted Deng as saying that the Soviet leader's later meeting with Zhao would "mark" normalization of party ties (Xinhua, Beijing television, 16 May; *Renmin Ribao*, 17 May). However, Chinese accounts of the meeting with Zhao also noted his assertion that party ties were normalized during Gorbachev's earlier meeting with Deng (Xinhua, Beijing television, 16 May; *Renmin Ribao*, 17 May). The context of Zhao's remarks—a long explanation of Deng's continued role as paramount leader and "helmsman"—suggests that Zhao may have intended his remarks for China's domestic audience, however.

Circumspection on Protests

Apparently reflecting Moscow's desire for a successful visit, as well as its uncertainty about the future of China's leadership, Soviet media did not take sides in reporting the massive protests during and after Gorbachev's visit. Disruptions to Gorbachev's official schedule were reported briefly, without any criticism of Chinese handling of the changes (Moscow television, 15 May; *Pravda*, 16 May; *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 17 May). Gorbachev himself was careful to keep his comments on the domestic upheaval in Beijing low key and inoffensive. Several times during his press conference, when pressed to comment on the demonstrations, he maintained his position that it was not his

place to "pass judgment" on the "difficult political dialogue" taking place. In the clearest sign of Soviet annoyance that the demonstrations were competing with the summit for Western media and public attention, Gorbachev said in a short interview with Moscow television before leaving Shanghai that his program there had been "completely wrecked (*slomalas*)." But he immediately added that his plans had been "wrecked in a good way" because it had allowed him to have contact with the "people of Shanghai" (Moscow television, 18 May). After Gorbachev's return to Moscow, media coverage of the situation in Beijing became more detailed and began to report the demonstrators' concrete demands, but both during and after the summit the media have pictured the protesters as having acceptable intentions (Moscow radio, 21 May; *Izvestiya*, *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 23 May; *Pravda*, 24 May).

Avoiding**Future Shock**

Moscow has gone out of its way to indicate that the hard-won foundation for the further development of Sino-Soviet relations will not be swept away by any leadership change in Beijing.

- The 21 May *Pravda* editorial wrapup on the visit did not refer to a single Chinese leader by name.
- The *Izvestiya* editorial published the same day mentioned Deng only once, citing him as urging Gorbachev to disregard the past and look to the future, but it did not mention any other Chinese leader by name.
- Boris Pyadyshev, a member of the Foreign Ministry collegium and editor in chief of the journal *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, asked a rhetorical question about the stability of the new Sino-Soviet relationship during Moscow radio's weekly roundtable discussion on 21 May. He answered optimistically, but equivocally, that "there are grounds" for believing that the normalization is based on "fairly firm foundations."
- A report on the Beijing demonstrations broadcast on the main Soviet evening television news on 21 May included short recorded interviews with protesters, all of whom disclaimed any connection between the protests and Sino-Soviet relations. The report ended on the reassuring note that although the situation in Beijing is "highly complex," one thing that is clear is that "equally in the top leadership and at the grassroots level" Chinese attitudes toward the USSR are "good."

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Outlook

While uncertainty over the final outcome of the leadership struggle in Beijing may put Sino-Soviet relations on hold temporarily, the USSR will undoubtedly continue to push for improvements in relations over the longer term. Moscow can take heart from the fact that the Chinese leadership at all levels appears solidly behind improving bilateral relations. Nonetheless, until the Chinese leadership resolves its current domestic political problems, Beijing will not be able to respond to further Soviet initiatives.